

Fulton Lewis Jr.

CHECK ON BROADCASTS

Munich, Sept. 24

I have spent many hours during this news-gathering sojourn in Europe studying the activities of Radio Free Europe and its several affiliated Free Europe operations.

Only a comparatively minor portion of this time was devoted to on-the-spot inspection of the physical facilities of the organization, headquartered here.

The fund-raising pitchmen make big ballyhoo about the equipment, the transmitters, the studios and the news-gathering machinery. They have organized tours for visitors, with a briefing room and standardized spiel, all of which means exactly nothing.

So far as I am aware, no one has ever argued that RFE's equipment is inferior or inadequate.

With the money they have had available, it could well be built of 24-karat gold.

The pertinent question is what goes out from the antennae, in the name of "truth," to the people behind the Iron Curtain, and whether it is heard by those people, and what effect it has; also how its host, the Bavarian government, appraises it, and what its colleagues among the German press think of it and how it is regarded by Munich.

After all, a \$10,000,000 radio plant can go down the drain to bankruptcy in six months, or a 250-watt coffee-pot operation can reap a bonanza in the same period, according to what the station puts on the air.

ADVERSE CRITICISM

And the answer to all these questions, in the case of Radio Free Europe is bad. In exploring the periphery of the RFE picture generally, I find a long history of highly adverse criticism in the Bavarian Parliament, to the extent that RFE is excluded from all participation in the screening of escapees and refugees in this, its residential German state.

Topside RFE personnel have been involved in a major black-market scandal which resulted in the firing or recall to the states of at least eight individuals. Efforts were made to hush this up, so far as the German press was concerned, but the chief counsel for the Free Europe Committee in New York was dispatched to Munich to handle the case at an expense of an estimated \$10,000.

Responsible German newsmen, editors and columnists inform me that they never cross paths with RFE reporters in the course of their professional pursuits and most of them are not even acquainted with any of the RFE personnel.

### CHECK ON LISTENERS

It would be unfair, perhaps, to report that German rank and file citizens to whom I talked said they have never listened to the RFE programs, because they have their own German language broadcast band stations, as we have, and RFE broadcasts mostly on short-wave, in non-German languages.

But among the many refugees and escapees who I interviewed in camps -- people from Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, to which countries and in which languages the RFE broadcasts are specifically beamed -- I have yet to find the first regular listener.

A few said they had heard of Radio Free Europe. Most of them got it confused with the Voice of American and the Armed Services network which commands a very extensive European listening audience, although it is a shoestring operation intended for American personnel stationed in Europe and their families.

### POLL TO BE TAKEN

By way of assembling more specific and detailed information to these ends, I have assigned three individual and unknown-to-each-other reporters here to conduct polls of refugee and escapee camps, to determine just what percentage of the Iron Curtain people have been RFE listeners.

It will be some weeks before the results of these polls are available, but when they are, they should provide a triply-checked measure of RFE's true effectiveness.

They spout ebullient claims of 70,000,000, that being the aggregate population of the countries to which they broadcast. I suspect that these polls will show otherwise.

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